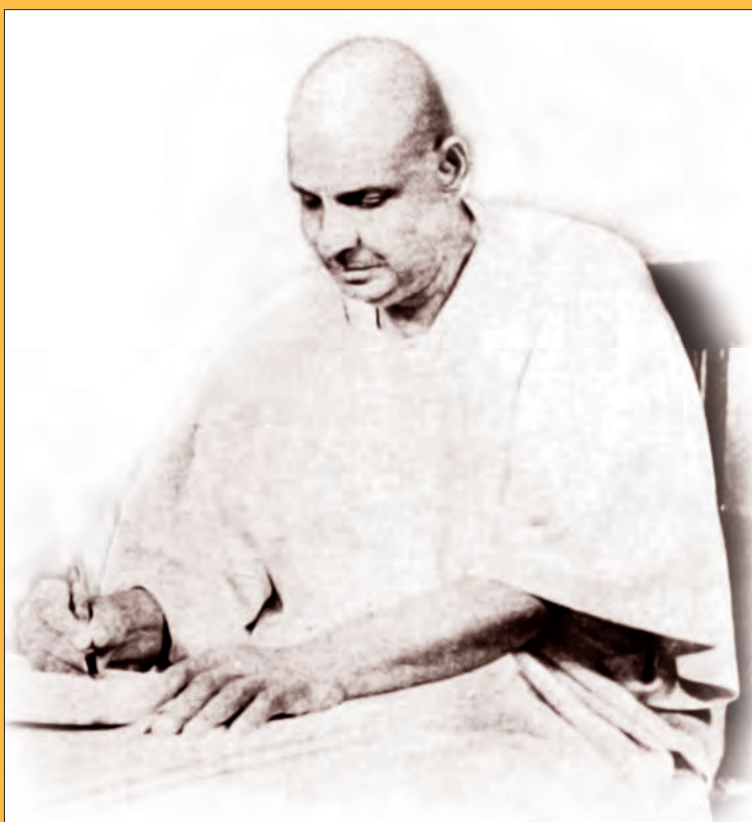


Water the Roots 2
Spiritual Diary
The Silent Master

Swami Sivananda Saraswati
The First Generation



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Introduction

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

How do we control a mind that, as Swami Sivananda says, is no better than a wild monkey, drunk and stung by a scorpion? How do we stop the constant replay of past events, in which we rearrange them into a better drama, or the planning of an imaginary future? Why do we so often find ourselves caught in a situation with the same frustrations, the same problems? Having recognized how thought



patterns develop, the next step is to become aware of the content of our patterns of thought, of what we are actually thinking. It is impossible to change unless we realize that change is necessary. We cannot lessen our anger unless and until we can see that we are angry.

We perceive clearly what is happening in other people's minds and lives, but when it comes to our own, we show little insight. To develop that insight we need to witness or watch the mind. One of the most effective ways of nurturing the ability to witness is to keep a spiritual diary. The practice

requires patience and perseverance, but gradually we watch ourselves in action, almost like characters in a film. We see when anger arises, or when we worry, or when we avoid certain situations or people. This allows us the opportunity to change. Observing how other people act, and asking ourselves honestly if we behave in the same way, will also give us insight into our behaviour.

The basic practice of right living is to train the mind to give. As Swami Sivananda says, "Giving is the law of life." This attitude can be developed in daily life, giving our time and energy, sharing food, giving encouragement. Give part of your income to charity. Share your happiness and positivity with others. Keep in front of you Swami Sivananda's injunction, "Do good and be good." The goal of your life is to express your full potential and true identity. To achieve this goal, instincts need to be sublimated and the higher aspect of your personality needs to be trained to assert itself. This higher part of the mind is strengthened by the performance of selfless actions. Act selflessly with a happy and light frame of mind – a sense of freedom and joy comes with a sincere disregard for personal reward.

Refrain from performing actions that you would not like other people to know about or you will become secretive and unable to relax for fear that you will be discovered. Be aware of the true motive behind each of your actions. The motive is more important than the action itself. Most actions have at their root a subconscious habit, based on the desire for pleasure, security, power and recognition.

At night, after the day is done, sit down, close your eyes and go back over the day's events. Think what you left undone and what mistakes you made, and with no sense of recrimination or shame, ask yourself what you should have done instead. Use your spiritual diary. The practice of regular introspection will help you overcome not only the waves of negative thoughts that can sometimes overwhelm you, but also the deeper negative thought patterns in the subconscious mind. As you continue the practice, you will notice that your motives will become selfless and compassionate.

IMPORTANCE OF A SPIRITUAL DIARY

Keeping a daily spiritual diary is an indispensable requisite. Those who are already in the habit know its incalculable advantages. The diary is your teacher and guide. It is the eye-opener. It will help you to destroy your negative qualities and to be regular in your spiritual practices. Those who wish to evolve rapidly must keep a daily record of their actions. If you regularly maintain a diary, you will attain solace, peace of mind, and quick progress on the spiritual path.

You will have to record in your diary the time you get up from bed in the morning and retire to bed, the hours of sleep, the study of religious books, the number of malas of japa, how many hours you meditate daily. Record the nature of mistakes you commit and the steps you take to rectify yourself in the form of fasting or increase in the number of malas of japa, and so on. Note the lies you have uttered in the course of the day, how many times you became angry and how long it lasted, and the methods you adopted in checking it. Record the number of pranayamas you did daily, how long you have practised asana, how many hours you have wasted in useless company and talk. You can also add how many hours you observed *mouna*, silence, daily.

Keeping a diary will teach you the value of time. At the end of every month, calculate the total number of hours you have spent in japa, study of spiritual books, sadhana, sleep, and so on, then you will be able to know how much time you are spending for spiritual purposes and how much you are wasting. In this way, you will be able to increase the period of japa and meditation gradually and you will not wish to waste a single minute unnecessarily. Only then will you understand the value of time and how it slips away.

Hari Om Tat Sat

How to Make Your Own Diary

Swami Sivananda Saraswati



Maintain a daily diary and realize the marvellous results! Did you keep night vigils on Sivaratri, Sri Krishna's birthday or on any other day? How many days did you fast? How many times did you fail in the control of bad habits? Just keep the diary and watch the results. If you want quick spiritual attainments, you should record everything in your diary.

To change the worldly nature requires rigorous sadhana. You should not hide your weaknesses and defects while making your daily diary. It is only to correct and mould yourself, to purge weaknesses, defects and errors, to develop the divine nature and attain self-realization that this diary is maintained. If the aspirant is sincere in his jottings, the diary itself will become his silent master which will open his eyes. Many people keep diaries of practical duties and tasks, but alas, they have neglected to keep up the most important diary, the spiritual diary, which will help to correct their mistakes and to attain quickly the final beatitude of life.

Several questions to suit all temperaments have been compiled in the following pages:

SPIRITUAL DIARY

When did you get up from bed?
How many hours did you sleep?
How many malas of japa did you do?
How long did you sing kirtan?
How long did you perform asana?
How many pranayamas did you do?
How long did you meditate in one asana?
How many slokas of the *Bhagavad Gita* did you read or learn by heart?
How long were you in the company of the wise, *satsang*?
How many hours did you observe mouna?
How long were you engaged in disinterested selfless service, karma yoga?
How much did you give in charity?
How many mantras did you write?
How long did you practise physical exercise?
How many lies did you tell and how did you correct yourself?
Did you experience greed today?
How many times and for how long did you get angry?
How many hours did you spend in useless company?
How many times did you fail in *brahmacharya*, celibacy?
How long did you spend in the study of religious books?
How long did you spend in self-study?
How many times did you fail in the control of bad habits and how did you correct yourself?
How long did you concentrate on your chosen deity, *ishta devata*?
How many days of fast and vigil did you observe?
Were you regular in your meditation?
What virtue are you developing? Were you successful today?
What negative quality are you trying to eradicate? Were you successful today?
Which *indriya* or sense is troubling you most?
When did you go to bed?

What time did you get up in the morning?

The purpose of this question is not to compel you to rise early in the morning by launching a fight against your habits, but to refashion the underground structure of the habit itself. You should take a weekly or monthly average of the time of rising.

How many hours did you sleep?

Many people are confused about this question for they are unable to decide the minimum and maximum hours of sleep. We need as much sleep as is required for proper decarbonization of the system, which may differ from individual to individual. The average requirement is six hours for intellectuals, eight hours for manual labourers and four hours for sadhakas. One who has attained samadhi does not need to sleep at all.

Those who sleep in excess generally have accumulated toxins in the system. If not, there may be psychological suppressions or deep, ingrained tensions. A normal person does not oversleep. You can minimize the hours of sleep by taking a sattwic diet, removing stress and tension, and practising more sadhana.

How long did you practise asana and pranayama?

Select a few asanas which suit you the most, or which have been selected by your guru and practise them regularly. Afterwards do pranayama. The total duration should be about thirty minutes.

How many malas of japa did you perform? How many minutes of meditation?

This is important. Therefore, make a firm resolve that you will practise a certain number of malas or a certain number of minutes daily. Over-enthusiasm is not good. Japa should be done with your guru mantra and mantras as recommended by the guru.

How long did you do karma yoga?

Write down the total number of hours of work. If you do every act mindfully and consciously, it becomes karma yoga. It

is karma when you act mechanically. A karma yogi is aware that he or she is doing a particular action; this is karma yoga. When you act without mindfulness, your actions are karmic. Through the practice of karma yoga you will develop the attitude of detachment and not be affected by external influences. When you complete the work with detachment you feel peaceful. Karma yoga is the best method for developing detachment. Every thought, word and



action should be accompanied by perfect awareness. If you practise awareness, the quality of detachment will develop in you in no time. Success and failure, victory and defeat, pain and pleasure will not have any effect on your mind.

How many times did you get angry? What was the process of self-rectification?

If you get angry, you must rectify yourself. As a token of punishment, the dearest thing must be given up. If you do not discipline yourself for undesirable actions every time you do them, you can impose cumulative punishment for a month of negligent acts. There is no benefit in getting angry, and for this act of indiscrimination and foolishness, you must correct yourself. You must beg pardon of the offended person and assure him or her that you are definitely going to correct yourself. You have to decide the form of retribution yourself.

Remember not to act when you are in an angry frame of mind. Act only when you are in a positive frame of mind.

Which good quality are you trying to cultivate?

First resolve to cultivate one good quality, but it should not be a difficult one. For instance, you can resolve to speak less and avoid irrelevant useless, sensational and futile talk. Then month by month, you continue to cultivate virtues like tolerance, helpfulness, and so on. If you were successful in maintaining the desired quality, mark 'yes' in your diary. If unsuccessful, mark 'no'.

Which bad quality are you trying to eradicate?

Do not take up a difficult quality to start with. Take for example, 'I shall not speak harsh words'. Later you can substitute it with jealousy, criticizing others, or more difficult qualities.

Did you fail in brahmacharya?

Lust, attraction or fascination for the opposite sex, and erotic dreams are all lapses in the observance of brahmacharya.

Did you experience greed?

Include here greed for food, clothes, position, power, fame, and so on.



How much time did you spend in self-study?

Swadhyaya, self-study, is an important part of life. At least ten minutes every day should be designated for this. Also books should be carefully selected for improving your spiritual knowledge and background.

How much time did you waste?

This includes time spent in gossiping, reading novels, magazines, newspapers, watching television, videos, day-dreaming, and so on.

How much time did you spend in mouna, silence?

Try to set aside a part of each day for mouna, for example, at meal times or from 6 pm until breakfast. It is also beneficial to practise one full day of mouna per week.

INSTRUCTIONS ON MAINTAINING THE DIARY

A big thief is hiding in your brain. He has snatched away your atmic pearl. He is giving you immense worries and troubles. He is deluding you. The thief is your mind. You must not be lenient towards him. Annoyance is the ripple of agitation in the mind-lake. It is a mild form of anger. Bragging and exaggeration are modifications of untruth.

All your daily mistakes will be corrected if you maintain a daily spiritual diary. A good time will come when you will be entirely free from anger, untruth, lust, and so on. You will become perfect.

Company with worldly-minded people is useless company. Find out your bad habits and remove them. You are the best judge in this direction. Try to minimize the time spent in useless company. Avoiding it altogether while remaining in the world is rather an impossibility. Cut short the conversation. Be on the alert. Speak little.

Practise duty for duty's sake. Work for work's sake should be your ideal. By and by as you become more and more pure, you will understand the spirit of *nishkama karma*, work done without

any selfish motive. When the mind is saturated with selfishness and desires, it is difficult to understand what nishkamya karma is. Service of the sick, service of society or country in any form with atmabhava or narayana bhava will constitute nishkamya karma yoga in the broad sense of the term.

Bad dreams, immoral books, unholy lustful thrills, attraction or fascination for the other sex, are breaks in the observance of brahmacharya. The aspirant should carefully avoid these. He should be forever vigilant and circumspect. Do not be ashamed of mentioning your mistakes, vices and failures. You should not utter any falsehood anywhere. You are keeping your spiritual diary only for your benefit. It is meant for your own progress. It is the diary of the aspirant who is treading the path of truth, and its purpose is to make you realize truth. Accept your faults openly and endeavour to rectify them in the future. You should not neglect to record everything in your diary. It is better you compare the progress of your work of the present week with that of the previous week. If you are not able to do so every week, you must at any cost compare it once a month.

When we start to practise meditation, we are often unaware of the nature of the work we are embarking on. It is only when clarity of mind begins to develop and our consciousness has expanded a little, that we realize the need for direction, advice, instruction and training. Keeping a spiritual diary charts our personal development, acting as both touchstone and encouragement. Finding a spiritual teacher who will support our endeavours and clarify the way ahead enables us to progress with greater confidence towards our goal.

KEEPING A SPIRITUAL DIARY

As meditation practice progresses, you will find that awareness of your moods, emotions, thoughts and actions increases appreciably. You begin to realize that the knowledge you previously had of your character and personality was considerably distorted by your own clouded perceptions. Most of us are masters at analyzing, judging and criticizing other



people's behaviour and character. We see clearly their failings and shortcomings, and when we are feeling generous we see their abilities and gifts, but when we scrutinize our own minds, a veil of ignorance and denial seems to descend.

Even after a short time of regular active meditation, an ability to witness our behaviour evolves along with a desire to change. In the beginning this can be quite overwhelming. We start to realize how angry we are, how much time we spend worrying, how tense we feel, how jealous, how greedy we can be. The revelations can be both bewildering and confusing. It is quite common for people to report that they feel less easy after a few months of meditation than they did before they began the practice. Invariably we are not happy with much of what confronts us. There is no need to worry. This is a sign of progress. All great spiritual traditions recognize this stage and offer a means of working with and through the revelations so that they do not overwhelm us, throwing us into depression and despair. One means is through the spiritual diary, a daily record of our behavioural patterns, character traits and idiosyncrasies.

In order to assess and evaluate one's progress, every individual is required to keep a spiritual diary. The diary is a whip for goading the mind. It is your teacher and guide. It will help you to remove your negative qualities and be regular in your sadhana. It shows the way to freedom and bliss. Those who wish to evolve rapidly must keep a daily record of their actions. If you maintain a diary regularly, you will progress rapidly on the spiritual path.

Along with keeping the diary, you have to make sensible resolves according to your capacity and circumstances, and stick to them at any cost. There are positive as well as negative resolves. For one negative resolve you should make a corresponding positive one. Otherwise the negative resolves will create unwanted complexes. Make as many resolves as possible. You do not become perfect on the day that you make a resolve, but it is better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all.



THE RESOLVE FORM

- I will perform asana and pranayama for minutes daily.
- I will take milk and fruits only instead of night meals once a week/fortnight/month.
- I will observe a fast on *Ekadashi* (the eleventh day of each lunar fortnight) or once a month. I will give up (one of my cherished objects of enjoyment) once every days/months or for days/months.
- I will not indulge in any of the following more than once every days/months or for months (smoking, cards, cinemas, novels, etc).
- I will observe mouna (complete silence) for minutes/hours daily and minutes/hours on Sunday/holidays, and use the time in concentration, meditation, japa and introspection.
- I will observe brahmacharya, for weeks/months at a time.
- I will not utter angry, harsh or vulgar words towards anyone during this day/week/year.
- I will speak the truth at all costs during this day/week/year.
- I will not entertain hatred or evil thoughts towards anyone.
- I will give away percent of my income in charity.
- I will perform selfless service, nishkamyā karma yoga, for hours daily/weekly.
- I will do malas of japa daily (mala of 108 beads).
- I will write my *ishta mantra*, guru mantra, in a notebook daily for minutes or pages.
- I will study slokas of the *Bhagavad Gita* daily with their meaning.
- I will maintain a daily spiritual diary.
- I will get up at am daily and spend in japa, concentration, meditation, prayers and sadhana.
- I will conduct kirtan with family members and friends daily for minutes/hours at night.

CONCLUSION

You will have to note down the difficulties and complexes which arise and preserve these notes in your place of sadhana. Whenever you feel restless and depressed you should go there, meditate for a while and read over your notes and resolves. This will give you peace of mind and remove feelings of negativity and doubt.

Do not waste precious hours. It is enough that you have wasted so many years in idle gossiping. Yes enough, enough of all that. Do not say, "From tomorrow I will be regular," for that 'tomorrow' will never come. Be sincere and start your sadhana from this moment. If you are truly sincere He is ever ready to help you, to give you a push in your spiritual march. Take out a copy of your diary and remember your guru who will guide you and remove all your obstacles.

Your father and mother gave you this body. They gave you food and clothing, but this diary is superior to your parents. It shows the way to freedom and eternal bliss. It is your guru. Turn the pages of your diary once a week. If you can record your actions every hour, your growth will be rapid. Happy is the sadhaka who keeps a daily diary for he is very near to God. He has a strong will and will be free from defects and mistakes.

You should record everything in your diary. You should not hide your weaknesses and defects. It is to correct and mould yourself, to remove your weaknesses and defects, to develop a spiritual nature and to achieve self-realization that this diary is maintained. If you are sincere, the diary itself will become your silent master which will open your eyes and direct you towards spiritual attainment.

Hari Om Tat Sat



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